

Title: *Play Like A River*

Public Art Project Fact Sheet



City of Tempe
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Photo: Elizabeth Lagman

Title: Play Like A River

Location: North Tempe Multigenerational Center

Artist: Thomas Strich

Completion: 2006

Medium: Cast concrete sculptures, colored concrete medallions and sand blasted concrete benches

Description: The public art for the North Tempe Multigenerational Center is rooted to a central path that runs the length of the facility site and takes the form of a metaphorical river. The components of *Play Like A River* infuse the river imagery with a playful spirit reflecting the community function of the center. All rivers have a source. At the north end of the path are *The Sources of Play*, water-carrier figures whose flowing contributions reflect the different aspects of human nature within play: *physique*, *intellect* and *emotion*. Concrete benches between the figures are inscribed with, "Play is like the water that sustains all life; the joy of play nourishes the human spirit." The concept of play is carried throughout the site with color-coded shapes imbedded in a river-like path. Three large whirlpool shaped "medallions" are inscribed with *The Elements of Play*. Along the path are bollards shaped with sinuously curved edges that resemble the curves of flowing river. The public art honors the multicultural character of the community and neighboring school with *The Diversity of Play*, featuring benches inscribed with the verb for "play" in 30 different languages.

Funding: The project was funded through city of Tempe Capital Improvement Project Percent for Art funds.

Artist biography: Thomas Strich was born and raised in California. He received a double B.A. degree in Studio Art and Art Theory from the University of California, Santa Cruz, and received an M.F.A. degree in sculpture from Arizona State University. Strich has been an Arizona-based artist since 1990. Since 1995 he has been applying his skills as a mixed media artist and photographer toward urban planning processes and public art projects. In his studio work, Strich has explored the mentality and perception that underscore the relationships humans develop with their natural environment. He has completed public art and private development projects for Tempe, Phoenix and Queen Creek.

Artist statement: "With the public art for the North Tempe Multigenerational Center, I worked to meld the visual metaphor of a flowing river with the idea of play. River topography and imagery are important aspects of our local geography. The design team for the North Tempe Multigenerational Center (MWK Architecture, Terrano Landscape Design and myself) decided that a symbolic river would form the central image and axis for the project as a whole. At the same time, I came to realize that the facility would largely function as a place for the community to come and play. The public art for the North Tempe Multigenerational Center is based upon two facts. Water is universal to life. Play is universal to the human condition. It is my hope that this project serves as an engaging reminder that water and play are essential to maintaining the health of the individual and the community."